The 22\textsuperscript{nd} Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights (ASEMHR22) will be held in Bangladesh from 15-17 May 2023. The event will see representatives from government agencies, NGOs, academia of ASEM Partner countries converge and engage in discourse on this year’s theme – “Human Rights and Poverty Reduction”.

Eliminating poverty has long been on the international agenda. It’s found within the pages of the United Nations Charter and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) to name a few. It tops the list of Sustainable Development Goals – “To end poverty, in all its forms, everywhere.” And to a certain extent, progress has indeed been made. Between 2015 and 2018, global poverty declined with extreme poverty rates falling from 10.1 \% to 8.6 \%.

However, it’s worth highlighting that the World Bank’s extreme poverty line is set at $2.15. We have to contend with the question of whether a person has escaped the clutches of poverty, if they earn more than a rather low threshold. Dr Olivier de Schutter, the UN Special Rapporteur on Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, who will be attending the seminar, has warned against believing that economic growth is a “magic wand” for ending poverty. Instead, he says the focus should instead be on reducing inequality.\textsuperscript{i} One reason for inequality has been the rise in cost of living, both in Europe and Asia. According to the Brookings Institution, the COVID-19 pandemic has accompanied an increase in poverty by 115 million people in 2021.\textsuperscript{ii} Naturally, in abid to reduce some burden on disposable incomes, government offer subsidies, rebates and cash payouts. Critics say such measures treat the symptoms, but not the root cause of the predicament.

This is where a human-rights approach can be utilised. Human Rights watchers say governments can steward change by developing robust legal frameworks that safeguard rights like adequate standard of living, health care, education and access to credit.\textsuperscript{iii} This in addition to specific safety nets for specific groups – vulnerable groups most susceptible to
economic and human rights lapses like women, the differently abled, children and refugees among others.

The importance of reducing inequality, to reduce poverty is also supported by Hans-Otto Sano, Emeritus Senior Reacher with the Danish Institute of Human Rights, and main Rapporteur for ASEMHR22. He says a human-rights approach, enables people to become empowered. A sense of agency made possible by social protection, which in turn lends itself to poverty reduction in the long-term.

Over the course of three days, representatives from over 50 member countries will be able to share their national experiences for better integration of human rights-based and people-centered development approaches in poverty alleviation policies, strategies and actions. They will not only hear from esteemed speakers, but also engage in working group discussions that will take a deep-dive into intersecting problem areas involving poverty, like climate change and gender inequality and also how change can be driven from the ground up. This, through multi-stakeholder partnerships as a driving force, from community-led activities to national and regional cooperation.

ASEMHR22 looks forward to providing a platform for knowledge exchange and creation, through participation and joint consideration of solutions to challenges arising from the nexus between human rights and poverty.

About the writer:

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For information about the Seminar, visit the project website [here](https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2023/mar/20/economic-growth-is-not-a-magic-wand-for-ending-poverty).


